

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 ACDA-07 NEA-10 /072 W

-----071406Z 097538 /46

R 071006Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 864

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 8837

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: MILITARY SITUATION IN MINDANAO/SULU

1. SUMMARY: EMBOFF VISITED MINDANAO AND SULU MAY 29-JUNE 6, 1977, INCLUDING SEATS OF FORMER MAJOR SULTANATES (JOLO AND COTABATO CITIES) WHICH, NOT COINCIDENTALLY, HAVE BEEN EPICENTERS OF ISLAMIC REBELLION. WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, CEASEFIRE IS HOLDING AND WHILE MANY DOUBTS REMAIN, THERE IS GENUINE HOPE, SHARED BY MILITARY, CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS (INCLUDING MNLF), THAT IT WILL CONTINUE TO HOLD. HOWEVER MILITARY ADMIT THAT CONTRARY TO GOP PUBLICITY, REBEL STRENGTH HAS NOT DIMINISHED AND SHOULD MAJOR FIGHTING RESUME, PHILIPPINE ARMED FORCES (AFP) RESOURCES COULD BE SEVERELY TAXED. END SUMMARY.

2. COTABATO AND LANA O SECTORS. CENTRAL COMMAND (CENCOM) COMMANDER BG. DELFIN CASTRO HAS 15 BATTALIONS DEPLOYED AGAINST AN ESTIMATED 12,000 REBELS IN COTABATO AND LANA O PROVINCES. CASTRO ESTIMATES THAT INCLUDING OFTEN UNRELIABLE MILITIA UNITS, GOVERNMENT FORCES HAVE ONLY A 2 TO 1 EDGE. AS IN
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PAST, ETHNIC MAGUINADANA O CONTINUE TO DOMINATE REBEL STRUCTURE, WHILE ETHNIC MARANA O REMAIN ABSORBED IN FRACTIOUS BUT INNER-DIRECTED LOCAL POLITICS. CASTRO PROFESSES GREATEST RESPECT FOR KUTAWATO REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE (KRC) WHICH IS COTABATO ARM OF MNLF, POINTING OUT THAT NOT ONE SIGNIFICANT KRC LEADER HAS EVER DEFECTED TO GOVERNMENT SIDE. CASTRO SAYS KRC HAS USED

CEASEFIRE PERIOD TO EXPAND ITS "COMMUNIST STYLE" CELL-TYPE ORGANIZATION AT VILLAGE LEVEL. ITS LEADERS CONTINUE TO PREACH ISLAMIC SOCIALIST DOCTRINE AIMED AS MUCH AGAINST TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADERS (MANY OF WHOM ARE WORKING WITH GOP) AS AGAINST GOVERNMENT. KRC HAS RECRUITED MILITARY VOLUNTEERS TO POINT WHERE THEY ARE NOW HAVING LOGISTICS AND SANITATION PROBLEMS AT MAIN CAMPS LOCATED NORTHEAST OF COTABATO CITY AND ELSEWHERE. IF MAJOR FIGHTING RESUMES, CASTRO BELIEVES HE HAS EDGE "AS LONG AS WE KEEP OUR HEADS" AND AS LONG AS HE RETAINS CURRENT ENLISTED FOOTSOLDIERS WHO ARE VETERANS AFTER TWO YEARS IN FIELD, BUT OVERDUE FOR REPLACEMENT.

3. AS ELSEWHERE, REBELS IN COTABATO ARE TAKING POSITION THEY WILL NOT BREAK CEASEFIRE UNLESS GOVERNMENT DOES SO FIRST. HOWEVER CASTRO SAYS HE HAS FAILED TO PERSUADE KRC LEADERS TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO ABIDE BY THIS POSITION SHOULD NUR MISUARI ORDER OTHERWISE. MINOR INCIDENTS AND AMBUSHINGS DO OCCUR, AND MILITARY IS NEVER SURE WHETHER THESE ARE ORCHESTRATED BY KRC. KRC IS ANXIOUSLY AWAITING RETURN OF MNLF DELEGATE THEM MANJOORSA FROM MIDDLE EAST IN HOPE HE WILL BRING FRESH INSTRUCTIONS. IN COTABATO (AS IN JOLO) "JOINT CEASEFIRE COMMITTEE" CONTINUES TO EXIST ALTHOUGH FOREIGN ELEMENTS HAVE DEPARTED. COMMITTEE CONSISTS OF REBEL LEADERS LIVING IN POSHEST OF LOCAL HOTELS AT GOP EXPENSE AND IS SERVING AS A USEFUL CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION TO MNLF FIELD COMMANDERS.

4. ATMOSPHERE IN COTABATO CITY IS VASTLY MORE RELAXED THAN ON EMBOFF'S LAST VISIT IN LATE 1974 WHEN AS OFTEN AS NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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CONVERSATIONS WERE PUNCTUATED BY GUNFIRE AND REBELS WERE MORTARING CITY CENTER. DAMAGE FROM AUGUST 1976 EARTHQUAKE HAS BEEN CLEANED UP MAINLY DUE EFFORTS OF LARGE AND PROSPEROUS CHINESE COMMUNITY. BUSINESS IS GOOD AND TRAFFIC MOVING ON ROADS INTO COUNTRYSIDE WITHOUT FEAR. ACCORDING CATHOLIC BISHOP MONGEAU, CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHICH A FEW MONTHS AGO FEARED MARCOS WAS SELLING OUT TO MUSLIMS NOW PERCEIVES THAT HE DOES NOT REPEAT NOT INTEND TO RELINQUISH POLITICAL CONTROL AT LOCAL LEVEL. THEY HAVE STOPPED SHIPPING CHILDREN OFF TO SCHOO IN LUZON, SELLING PROPERTY, ETC., AND THERE IS MUCH LESS TALK OF REVIVING ARMED CHRISTIAN IRREGULARS. ACCORDING TO MONGEAU, CHRISTIANS ARE WILLING TO TOLERATE VAST SUMS OF MONEY OFTEN WASTEFULLY EXPENDED FORM MUSLIM

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 8837

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

DEVELOPMENT, JOBS, ETC., SYMBOLIZED BY LAVISH NEW HEAD-
QUARTERS BUILDING FOR REGION XII, AS LONG AS THEY REALIZE
BASIC POLITICAL STRUCTURE NOT SHIFTING. (OTHER SOURCE
ENCOUNTERED ON TRIP CONFIRMED LESSENING OF CHRISTIAN
TENSIONS IN MOST AREAS.)

5. JOLO. LIKE COTABATO, JOLO HAS COME A LONG WAY TOWARD
PEACE. ACCORDING FIRST DIVISION COMMANDER BG. BAUSTISTA,
FIGHTING WAS HEAVY UNTIL FINAL CEASEFIRE (JANUARY 20).
SEINCE THEN, THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING MAJOR, ALTHOUGH
SMUGGLING AND ARMED PIRACY AGAINST FISHERMEN REMAIN A
CONSTANT PROBLEM. AFP HAS ELEVEN BATTALIONS ON JOLO ISLAND
DEPLOYED AGAINST AN ESTIMATED 2-3,000 "SERIOUS" REBELS.
FIGURE MAY BE LOW AND SITUATION IS ENDLESSLY COMPLICATED
BY FACT THAT ANY NORMAL YOUNG TAUSUG IS SORELY TEMPTED TO
INDULGE IN AMBUSH AGAINST THE MILITARY SIMPLY TO OBTAIN THE
ULTIMATE STATUS SYMBOL, A RIFLE. NEVERTHELESS MILITARY ARE
NOW TRAVELING CAUTIOUSLY TO MOST AREAS TO THE SIXTY KM.
LONG ISLAND.

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6. BRIGADE CO COL. CANIOSA TOLD EMBOFF THAT JOLO REBEL
LEADERS DIVIDE INTO "TRADITIONAL CLAN LEADERS" AND "YOUNG
IDEALOGUES." TRADITIONAL LEADERS, HAVING WEIGHTED COST OF
YEARS OF WAR, ARE NOW LARGELY ON GOVERNMENT SIDE, AND

DURING CEASEFIRE

PERIOD "YOUNG IDEOLOGUES" HAVE STARTED
QUARRELING AMONG THEMSELVES. BUT CANIOSA ADMITTED GOP
HAS "BARELY STARTED" TO REACH LATTER GROUP. JOLO TOWN
IS STILL DEPRESSED AND SCARS OF FEBRUARY 1974 REBEL
CAPTURE CLEARLY VISIBLE (MAYOR'S OFFICE ESTAIMES ONLY
50 PERCENT OF DAMAGE REPAIED TO DATE.)

7. OTHER AREAS. REAMINDER OF SULU AND TAWI-TAWI PROVINCES
NOW FREE OF MNLF EXCEPT FOR JUNGLED MAINLAND OF TAWI-TAWI
ISLAND WHERE REBEL STRENGTH CENTERED IN TARAWAKEN AREA.
(ON TAWI-TAWI, RAMPANT MALARIA SPREADY BY ROTATION OF
MILITARY PERSONNEL HAS BECOME MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM
THAN MNLF.) CONDITIONS ON BASILAN ISLAND AND HINTERLAND
OF ZAMBOANGA ALSO GREATLY IMPROVED, WITH LOGGING/PLANTATION
ACTIVITY MORE OR LESS BACK TO NORMAL ("NORMAL" INCLUDES
DEGREE OF BANDITRY, PIRACY, ETC.). FOUR NEW HOTELS IN
ZAMBOANGA (WITH FIFTH PLANNED) ARE RUNNING AT RESPECTABLE
OCCUPANCY (CERTAINLY NO LOWER THAN COUNTERPARTS IN MANILA)
AND WITH WANING OF KIDNAPPING THREAT, JAPANESE

TOURISTS ARE BEGINNING TO RETURN.

8. CONCLUSION. IN WHAT HAVE BEEN MOST CRITICAL SECTORS OF
REBELLION, HOPE FOR MINDANAO PEACE IS GENUINE AND BROADLY
BASED. CALL TO ARMS BY CENTRAL MNLF COULD SHATTER CURRENT
CALM, BUT MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THIS UNLIELY IN VIEW OF
NON-PROVOCATIVE STAND TAKEN BY ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AND
EVIDENT RELUCTANCE OF LOCAL MNLF TO ASSUME ONUS OF
REINITIATING CONFLICT. MNLF'S CONTINUING POLITICAL
STRUGGLE WITH SOME SUCCESS. GOP STRATEGY REMAINS TO RELY
ON TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND EMPHASIZE SHOWPIECE DEVELOPMENT
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PROJECTS. GOP HAS NOT YET SUCCEDED IN REACHING "YOUNG
IDEOLOGUES" (LARGELY EX-SCHOOLTEACHERS, STUDENTS,ETC.).
WHO ARE CORE OF MNLF STREGNTH. BOTH SIDES POSSESS
FORMIDABLE MILITARY STRENGTH AND POSSIBILITY OF ACCIDENTAL
ESCALATION OF INCIDENTS WILL REMAIN. PHILIPPINE MILITARY
COMMANDERS ARE WELL AWARE OF REBEL/GOVERNMENT RELATIVE
STRENGTHS/WEAKENSSES. THEY ARE TAKING GENRALLY
SOPHISTTICATED APPROACH TO COMPLX PROBLEM AND -- PERHAPS
AS IMPORTANT -- DISCIPLINE OF TROOPS APPEARS TO HAVE
NOTICEABLY IMPROVED.

9. IN SHORT, SEEN FROM MINDANAO/SULU PERSPECTIVE, MARCOS'
GAMBLE ON QADHAFI, AND ABOVE ALL THE CEASEFIRE PROVISION
IN THE DECEMBER 20 TRIPOLI AGREEMENT, HAVE ALREADY PAID OFF
FAR BETTER THAN CRITICS ANTICIPATED. ANOTHER SIX MONTHS
OF THE SAME, IF THIS CAN BE REALIZED, SHOULD IMPROVE THE

SECURITY SITUATION TO AT LEAST WHAT IT WAS BEFORE MARTIAL
LAW -- HARDLY PERFECT, IRRITATED BY MANY ANCIENT PROBLEMS,
BUT SOMETHING WELL SHORT OF WAR.
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Message Attributes

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TAGS: PINS, MOPS, RP
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